

Ethnography in a Time of Blurred Genres

RUTH BEHAR

*Department of Anthropology
University of Michigan
101 West Hall
1085 S. University
Ann Arbor, MI 48109–1107*

SUMMARY *Drawing from Francine Prose's Reading Like a Writer (2006), this article offers suggestions for reading ethnographies in a new way: with an eye toward learning how they were written and what literary feats they accomplished. In a time of blurred genres, the line between fiction and nonfiction has become increasingly indistinct and it is no longer so clear where ethnography is to be positioned. It is therefore important to reassess the possibilities and limits of ethnography as a literary genre if we are to understand the idiosyncrasies of its "art."* [Keywords: blurred genres, ethnographic writing, autoethnography, history of anthropology, reflexivity]

Prologue

I think it's wonderful that we've come together for a special issue on the art of ethnography.

This must mean that we agree that ethnography has an "art." But there might be a slight problem: *Does* ethnography have an "art"? And there might be an even bigger problem: Do anthropologists truly *want* ethnography to have an "art"? I think most anthropologists would rather ethnography didn't have any "art" at all.

So what we have is a conundrum: If those of us who see or desire or dream of an "art" of ethnography are just a small minority in our discipline, might we be better off simply writing memoir or creative nonfiction or travel writing or chronicles or poetry? Beyond anthropology and a few academic disciplines, like education or composition and rhetoric, the genre of ethnography remains a mystery. Those who think they know what ethnography is tend to associate it with the social sciences and the careful scrutiny of social systems, rather than with artful forms of creative writing.

The question thus arises: for us, the artsy ethnographers, does thinking of our work as ethnography set us up to fail as would-be artists? And there's more: by calling our work ethnography, might we lose the chance to publish our work with mainstream publishers? Might we lose readers?

Finally, why should we stay loyal to ethnography? In a time of blurred genres—when fiction bleeds into memoir and vice versa—does it make sense to seek out a unique identity for ethnography, a genre which partakes of both

memoir and fiction and yet is neither (Geertz 1983)? If, as I have suggested previously, ethnography is a “second-fiddle genre” (Behar 1999) or a “lost book” (Behar 2003), why continue to try to resurrect it?

I’m not sure I can answer these questions with any degree of depth in a brief article, but I hope to set forth at least the outline of an agenda for the changes I feel would need to take place for us to be able to claim an art of, and an art for, ethnography.

We are fortunate to have the Society for Humanistic Anthropology, which encourages the writing of poetry, fiction, and creative non-fiction by anthropologists. This is very positive, and no doubt in the future we’ll have more anthropologists who are equally strong poets and writers.

But I think we need to go further if we’re serious about wanting to practice an art that is specific to ethnography. For this to happen, there are four things we must do:

1. Learn more about the history of ethnography and how our predecessors thought about the art of what they wrote;
2. Start reflecting more about how ethnographers write: how they use words, sentences, paragraphs, narration, character, dialogue, details, gestures;
3. Start reflecting more about how ethnographers read: what books they love and why, and how ethnographers have learned to write from reading them; and
4. Develop an institutional structure that supports the imaginative work of ethnographers in both anthropology and creative writing.

The Legacy of Ruth Benedict’s Forgotten Poems for Ethnography

Let’s consider the question of history first. In 1986 Stanley Diamond edited a special issue on “Poetry and Anthropology” in the journal *Dialectical Anthropology*, which was framed by two telling epigraphs. The first, by Franz Boas, the German Jewish father of American anthropology, states: “I’d rather have written a good poem than all the books I’d ever written—to say nothing of a movement in a symphony.” The second, by Edward Sapir, is part of a letter addressed to his friend, Ruth Benedict. Sapir writes to Benedict, “It is no secret between us that I look upon your poems as infinitely more important than anything, no matter how brilliant, you are fated to contribute to anthropology” (Diamond 1986:130). Both of these statements were made in 1926.

The volume that Diamond edited includes the poems of Ruth Benedict. Much as I hate to say it, Benedict’s poems don’t shine; they range from acceptable to dismal. For example, Benedict’s three-stanza poem about her grandmother, entitled “Of Graves,” with its all-too-basic rhymes, describes her elder’s carefree relationship to death in this way: “The rabbit nibbled at the grass/Will someday cover me.” The closing stanza reads: “And days I shiver swift and strange/This still is what I see:/Sunlight and rabbit in the grass/And peace possesses me” (Benedict 1986:169). After reading this poem and others equally wanting, I, for one, have to disagree with Edward Sapir. I think we have to be very glad that Ruth Benedict wrote her anthropology books. Their importance, and certainly their influence, have been far greater than her poems, which have mercifully fallen into oblivion.

Of course, I feel terrible saying this. But the truth is that Ruth Benedict's poems are a less significant achievement, not because she lacked talent but because her poems, largely written in the 1920s and early 1930s, were simply not given the same chance to grow and flourish as her anthropological writings. The more she focused her energies on anthropology, the more her poetry became a secondary and secret pursuit. At her death in 1948, Benedict left many unpublished poems; those that she published, in prestigious journals like *Poetry* and *The Nation*, didn't carry her real name. They were published under the pseudonyms of Ruth Stanhope and Anne Singleton, in an effort to keep them hidden from the eyes of her academic colleagues, and especially, from the eyes of her revered mentor, Papa Franz, who she feared would scoff at her flings with the Muse. But as it turns out, while Papa Franz was busy building anthropology into an intellectual edifice that could speak to the ruins of the past and the racisms of the present, he secretly wished he could say what it all meant in a good poem, or, alas, being soulfully German, in the movement of a symphony rather than in hundreds of anthropology papers.

Ruth Benedict provided a model that many of us, myself included, have followed. The poetic legacy she left us, I believe, is not in the words she wrote in verse and published under an alias, but in the poetry she spun through her anthropology, the poetic sensibility that she brought to her scholarship and made inseparable from her scholarship. There is a certain pathos about this, to be sure. She brought poetry home and dressed it as something else, so she could stay loyal to anthropology. This was good for anthropology, very good for anthropology. But what was good for anthropology was not so good for Ruth Benedict's ambitions as a poet. This is a subject for another article that maybe someone should write—how it is that the art of ethnography has been born from the work of failed poets, failed novelists, failed artists.

But for the moment, we should focus on learning from Benedict and other poetic ethnographers. Yet this is particularly challenging given our lack of interest regarding how ethnographers write and how what they read makes them the kind of writers they are. What we need now more than ever is the ethnographic equivalent of the new book by Francine Prose, *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and For Those Who Want to Write Them* (2006). What Prose says about how creative writing is taught struck a chord with me because it seemed similar to how students are taught to read ethnography. As she remarks, "I was struck by how little attention students had been taught to pay to the language, to the actual words and sentences that a writer had used. Instead, they had been encouraged to form strong, critical, and often negative opinions. . . . No wonder my students found it so stressful to read! I asked myself how they planned to learn to write, since I had always thought that others learned, as I had, from reading." Prose decided to offer a close-reading course as a companion and sometimes an alternative to the writing workshop. Using what she calls "the more pedestrian, halting method of beginning at the beginning, lingering over every word, every phrase, every image, considering how it enhanced and contributed to the story as a whole," she discovered that this method helped both her and the students find "the energy and courage it takes to sit down at a desk each day and resume the process of learning, anew, to write" (Prose 2006:10–11).

I realize an immediate objection will be raised against the idea of borrowing such a model for ethnography. For Francine Prose, the best way to learn to write is to slowly and carefully soak up masterpieces by Chekhov, Joyce, Austen, Kafka, and so forth. No insult intended to anyone in anthropology, but I'm not sure ethnography has produced any similar literary giants, at least not yet.

Ethnography is, after all, a young genre. That is why, for a long time, we were satisfied with Clifford Geertz's idea that all the genre required was "thick description" (Geertz 1973). Or why later, we accepted James Clifford's idea that the genre was about our projections and allegories and nothing more (Clifford 1986; 1988). This also explains why we almost gave up entirely when Mary Louise Pratt said we were very interesting people who wrote very boring books (Pratt 1986:33). But I think if we follow Prose's example and look to our favorite ethnographers, we will find examples of the range of mini-artistic feats they had to be able to pull off to make their ethnographies compelling, and to give us hope that ethnography might potentially still develop into a genre that has a distinguishable art to it.

Reading Ethnographies Like a Writer

The first feat we need to accomplish in ethnography is to figure out how to introduce the specificities, such as the setting and the key protagonists of our story, while weaving in general background and historical information. Barbara Myerhoff's *Number Our Days* (1978), serves as an excellent model. Without any fanfare, Myerhoff accomplishes perfectly the task of bringing us into the story through the title of her first chapter, "So what do you want from us here?" The chapter title is a question, which establishes that her research subjects are not passive informants but, instead, people who confidently question the motivations of the ethnographer. The phrasing of the question also neatly prepares us to listen to the voices of the elderly Jews who will be at the center of her story. Now consider the juxtaposition of the two narrative voices that Myerhoff offers at the beginning of the chapter. On the one hand, in italics: "*Every morning I wake up in pain. I wiggle my toes. Good. They still obey. I open my eyes. Good. I can see. Everything hurts but I get dressed. I walk down to the ocean. Good. It's still there. Now my day can start. About tomorrow I never know. After all, I'm eighty-nine. I can't live forever.*" Following that text we read: "Death and the ocean are protagonists in Basha's life. They provide points of orientation, comforting in their certitude. One visible, the other invisible, neither hostile nor friendly, they accompany her as she walks down the boardwalk to the Aliyah Senior Citizens' Center" (Myerhoff 1978:1-2).

In these two brief opening paragraphs, Myerhoff shows the counterpoint between Basha's voice and her voice as the ethnographer. She also lets us know that the action of the story will take place at the Aliyah Center. This is all done on page one. And by page three, Myerhoff skillfully draws our attention to the layers of history that inform her story: "Basha, like many of the three hundred or so elderly members of Aliyah Center, was born and spent much of her childhood in one of the . . . shtetls within the Pale of Settlement of Czarist Russia." With quick strokes, Myerhoff mentions the pogroms, the economic and legal restrictions, and the exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe "to seek freedom and

opportunity in the New World." And then we're back to Basha, and a vivid description of her body that also seamlessly weaves in history: "Basha is not quite five feet tall. She is a sturdy boat of a woman—wide, strong of frame, and heavily corseted. She navigates her great monobosom before her, supported by hips and thin, severely bowed legs, their shape the heritage of her malnourished childhood" (Myerhoff 1978:3).

A second feat we must learn in order to write ethnography artfully is how to quote people in a way that flows gracefully with our general reflections. Julie Taylor in *Paper Tangos* is able to move elegantly between the dance floor and her meditations on the dance and the paradoxes of being a thinking woman who chooses to surrender to its highly gendered social order: "And who controlled whom, finally? All the women were on guard against dominating men. They were a problem in the tango as they were in our jobs and families. . . . 'Avoid thinking,' we were told. This happened so often that a serious Swiss dancer, called upon to explain why she continually repeated a particular mistake, painfully analyzed in careful Spanish, 'I was thinking, and that is very bad'" (Taylor 1998:107).

There are as many ways of quoting the people who become the subjects of our ethnographies as there are ways of writing ethnographies. Quotes can be minimalist, brief and poignant, inserted within the ethnographer's reflections, as in Taylor's work. Or quotes can be made to stand more fully on their own, so that the voices of the subjects are weightier and resonant, with commentary provided by the ethnographer elsewhere in the text. Myra Bluebond-Langner's (1978) study of children dying of leukemia in an Illinois hospital is an example of quotation-thick ethnography. An entire chapter of her book is presented in the form of a play. This format, she felt, allowed her to better illuminate the experience of the group of children she met. The play is a telling of one child's story, a composite character she named Jeffrey Andrews, as he moves from diagnosis to death. Mr. and Mrs. Andrews, Jeffrey, the doctors and nurses, other children, and Myra herself all become characters in the play, speaking their parts. Bluebond-Langner explains that she created the play from taped conversations and field notes. But clearly she took some artistic liberties in order to create dramatic speech and to show how Jeffrey is aware of his impending death:

- MYRA: I saw your mother at the elevator. She'll be in soon.
 JEFFREY: (Angrily) I told her she could have one cigarette.
 MYRA: Jeffrey, why do you always yell at your mother?
 JEFFREY: Then she won't miss me when I'm gone. [Bluebond-Langner 1978:126]

But the most quotation-thick form of ethnography has long been the life history, which allows ethnographers to place the words of their subjects at the center of the text. In my book, *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* (1993), I felt that I acted as a scribe and translator for Esperanza. She had much to say, breathlessly filling my tape recorder with accounts of her rage, her sorrows, and her quest for redemption. But to transport her story into the academic world on the other side of the border, I also ended up having to become her editor, snipping at her tales to give them artistic form, which

made me anxious about cutting her tongue, rather than “giving her voice.” Esperanza recognized my predicament in her own way, wondering how I would handle being the bearer of her “sins.” As she put it, “Priests confess people, right? And then, maybe not at the moment, but the following day, they confess their own sins. But to whom? To the bishops. And the bishops, to whom? To the archbishops. And the archbishops to whom? To God! Now you, comadre, who are you going to get rid of them with? You tell them somewhere ahead, so someone else can carry the burden” (Behar 1993:164). Following Esperanza’s advice, I retold her story in as much luxurious detail as was possible without making the book shapeless. Then, at the end of the book I included what I thought was a brief autobiographic chapter where I discussed how I was transformed by the act of listening to Esperanza’s story. Not surprisingly, some critics felt the inclusion of this chapter was a deviation from the life history as a genre designed for the informant to speak uninterrupted (Frank 1995).

Perhaps the most difficult feat of all is to insert our participating-and-observing selves into the story so that we are as embodied as our subjects, while not appearing to compete with our subjects for the limelight. José Limón is a master at doing this while also providing just as much dialogue as needed along with vivid descriptions. Consider the scene at el Cielo Azul Dance Hall, when José goes for a bathroom break. “The bathroom reeks of everything in this world that reeks. As I am finishing up at the urinals, I become aware of three or four guys watching me intently as they pass a joint among themselves. Tough. Sullen. Long scraggly black hair. Dark glasses. One really big guy, the others lean and gaunt but tough. . . . As I go by, their eyes follow—even with dark glasses, I can tell—and one of them lifts his head up ever so slightly and softly says, “Qu’uvo?” (What’s goin’ on?) I look at him carefully in the dark glasses and say just as softly, “Aquí nomás” ([Everything’s cool] Limón 1994:146).

Writing about his own community, Limón had to find a way to be both inside and outside the reality he is describing, and he communicates this doubled positioning by showing how he is the object of the gaze while also indicating that he’s readily able to look back and talk the local talk. While the meaning of “native anthropology” has been debated (Narayan 1997), it seems to me that ethnographers who view themselves as writing from a “native” position have made some of the most important contributions to ethnography as a literary genre. Pioneers like Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Deloria conducted ethnography at home because the method otherwise made no sense to them. They wrote about their experiences in texts that pushed at the boundaries of ethnography as a genre (Finn 1995; Hernández 1995). But it wasn’t until the 1970s and 1980s that ethnography could legitimately be a way for anthropologists to explore homecoming, as happened in the case of Myerhoff and Limón, whose work stands out for their willingness to explore on the written page their own uneasiness at simultaneously being ethnographers and natives.

The level of revelatory detail and personal engagement one finds in the accounts of Myerhoff and Limón need not, however, be limited to the work of ethnographers who go home. The very meaning of home gets stretched by ethnographers whose “field sites,” through the process of everyday living, become home locations. Anthropologists have not been as keen to explore

such locations, but recently two sociologists, Mitchell Duneier and Loic Wacquant, have turned to ethnography as a way to tell the story of urban places they came to know. Both are white sociologists who have worked with black subjects, Duneier in New York City and Wacquant in Chicago, and while they write intensely about race and class, their theoretical commitments do not keep them from writing ethnographies steeped in dialogue, narrative, and exquisite being-thereness. What is striking about their books is that both, in different ways, achieve a profound degree of nativeness by engaging not simply in participant-observation but the observation of participation (Tedlock 1991).

In Duneier's account of street book vendors in Greenwich Village, we learn right away that Duneier is not the only one who is closely observing the reality of life on the sidewalk. From the first page we are introduced to Hakim Hasan, a street vendor who is as much a reader and thinker as Duneier. Eventually we see Hakim become not simply a "key informant," but a true collaborator in the intricate work of social analysis. As other characters are introduced into the story, Duneier chooses to use conversation as a means of relaying information, rather than generalizations or summaries. We see this technique from the first moment Hakim appears:

Not long after we met, I asked Hakim how he saw his role.

"I'm a public character," he told me.

"A what?" I asked.

"Have you ever read Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*?" he asked. "You'll find it in there." [Duneier 1999:7]

By means of this conversational method, Duneier is able to insert himself gracefully into the text as one more character in the story. Eventually, as the research progresses, Duneier even hands over the tape recorder to Hakim and other vendors working on the sidewalk and lets them record conversations as they see fit. He also spends a long period of time working as a street vendor himself. And just to be sure that his observations are not solely made from his subject position, he invites an African American photographer to carry out a parallel visual ethnography incorporating pictures of the vendors on the sidewalk and in their ragtag living spaces. The photographs in the book are yet another way for Duneier to share ethnographic authority with other observers who contribute additional layers of complexity and depth.

Wacquant pursues nativeness with even greater fervor, deciding to join a boxing gym, the Woodlawn Boys Club, while living in Chicago as an advanced graduate student. Like Duneier, he too finds a key informant, DeeDee, who initiates him into the pugilistic cult. Over a period of three years, Wacquant learns to box while energetically writing field notes about the social world created by the men in the club. Wacquant uses some conversation in his text, but he bases the bulk of his ethnography on what appear to be raw field notes, in which he often explores his own ambivalence about his desire to box. As he writes, "I realize that today is my baptism by fire: I'm going to do my first tryout in the ring! I feel a twinge of apprehension simultaneously with the satisfaction of having finally come to this rite of passage. I hadn't expected it and I'm worried about not being in very good shape; what's more, I still have a tenacious pain in my right wrist. But I just can't back out now. Besides, I'm eager to get it

on. . . . Is it not strange to get all excited at the prospect of getting smacked in the noggin?" (Wacquant 2004:71). Ethnographers have tended to represent themselves as minds floating about the world without any kind of body to hamper them. Wacquant, without a doubt, is about as embodied in his text as an ethnographer can be. His writing serves as a model for all who are looking for examples of how to bring a fuller sense of embodied presence to their ethnographies.

It is often automatically assumed that women ethnographers write autobiographically and corporally much more frequently than male ethnographers, but this is not always the case. Robert Murphy's *The Body Silent* (1990) is an autoethnography that deserves to be read more frequently for its craft and its attention to the theme of embodiment. His book is an unusually outspoken account of a male anthropologist's gradual descent into paralysis as a result of a tumor of the spinal cord. Once a hardy anthropologist who spent a year with his wife, Yolanda, living in a remote region of the Amazon among the Mundurucu people, Murphy found himself "losing the will to move" as his paralysis progressed. Murphy describes the turn inward, from his body into his mind, as "the deepening silence" and shuns self-pity as he declares that paralysis is like "either returning to the womb or dying slowly, which are one and the same thing." This rebirth, which is also a death, inspires writing that movingly conveys what it means to exist in a body that is wilting away: "It is hard for the average person even to understand, let alone empathize with, total physical helplessness. For example, in my third month in the wheelchair, I leaned too far forward one day, the chair tilted, and I slid out and onto the floor of our house. Falling is a constant dread of all chair users, for it robs one of mobility and access to help. Fortunately, I landed in a kneeling position in front of the phone, and I simply called the police to come and help me" (Murphy 1990:196).

The unflinchingly honest accounts of his body's inertness are balanced by a detailed description of his dependency on his wife, Yolanda, who must eventually attend to all of his physical needs. I don't know of many other anthropologists who've been so honest about their marriages; it is painful to say, but I doubt Murphy himself would have entered into this self-reflexive terrain if he hadn't experienced such overwhelming disablement. And, yet, his personal account is not simply autobiographic; he succeeds in conveying what it means to be disabled and thereby is unimpeachably ethnographic in shedding light on a more general human condition. He also uses ethnographic thinking about social norms of honor and shame to propose a theoretical understanding of disability in American society and even to analyze the discourse that buttresses its values of masculinized power: "Independence, self-reliance, and personal autonomy are central values in American culture. One of our most persistent myths is that the country was built upon the efforts of singular individuals, men who had the daring and vision to found great enterprises. . . . These men, so the myth goes, succeeded without help from government, or anybody else. They stood alone and—to use the current metaphor—they stood tall." Murphy goes on to analyze figures like Rambo and Shane, who represent "denials of emasculation, assertions of autonomy" and to state that "the disabled are indisputably the quintessential American anti-heroes" and their dependence on others brings "debasement of status in American culture—and in many other cultures" (Murphy 1990:199–201).

Murphy takes us on a journey, not to an exotic place or time but, rather, into the nature of what constitutes freedom. His ethnography asks readers to ponder the meaning of life—"Is death preferable to disablement?" he asks. In response, he states, "The paralytic is, quite literally, a prisoner of the flesh, but most humans are convicts of sorts. We live within walls of our own making, staring out at life through bars thrown up by culture and annealed by our fears." His own personal situation opens up into a universal quest. As he states, "the paralytic—and all of us—will find freedom within the contours of the mind and in the transports of the imagination" (1990:230–231). His ethnography manages to be well-written on many different levels—as autobiography, as sociology, as deeply-felt philosophical reflection. It is this multivocality that makes *The Body Silent* a distinctive example of how ethnography can lay claim to its own unique art.

Pursuing the Art of Ethnography without Fear

As these examples show, if we start reading ethnography in terms of what it does artistically, seeing how it transports the imagination—instead of exclusively reading for the information it offers or the theory it tackles—we can learn a lot about how to bring the art into our ethnographies. Clearly this is something we each can do and the more of us who do it, the better our writing will be. But until we are able to incorporate such an approach into our departments of Anthropology, we won't have much of an impact. Short of requiring all anthropology graduate students *and* their professors to get an MFA, we have to validate the art of ethnography in our curriculum, journals, and conferences, or it will remain marginal.

Part of the difficulty in changing our institutional structures is that there is a huge fear of good writing in anthropology—the assumption being that good writing has a scary tendency to be precious, a bit too full of itself, or self-indulgent (always a no-no in anthropology). Good writing is also seen as a distraction from the reality at hand that needs to be analyzed rigorously and unselfishly. It seems to me that a work ethic became established in anthropology from its very earliest days that disdained all suggestions that ethnography as a method and a literary form could be a source of pleasure. Good writing was associated with pleasure, with frilliness, with caviar and champagne, and the job of ethnography required that we forego such privileges and get down and dirty with the natives. Call it slumming, if you want to be cynical, but I think the attitude came from a sincere desire to be there for and with "the other." A certain moral righteousness ordained that we not spotlight the ethnographer carrying out the work, but those who could be assisted in their quest for cultural survival through our attention, observation, and publications. Ethnographic writing had to be plain and simple, pure as Ivory Soap.

This ideology changed as anthropology became an academic discipline and the writing of ethnography had to serve as a persuasive example of the scientific endeavor that underlay our travels. Ethnography then became a strangely blurred genre that had to mesh the description of a people and a place with a ritual incantation of the theoretical literature that had preceded the ethnographer on his or her journey. Even with the appearance of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), ethnographers weren't encouraged to write with a greater

consciousness of their art. On the contrary, the volume presented a model of highly sophisticated academic writing infused with large doses of theoretical discussion and complex analyses of rhetoric. In addition, the reminder to ethnographers that their concern should be not only “poetics” but also “politics” served as a caution, letting us know that we had to stay true to our obligation to serve larger causes and not get carried away pursuing artsiness in our writing.

Every year I teach a graduate writing workshop on ethnographic writing and it is students in creative writing who now fill my classroom, not the anthropology students for whom I thought I’d created the course. Students in creative writing are eager to learn about every genre in the universe, in order to stretch themselves as writers. But this is not the case among most students in anthropology, who generally come to the discipline attracted more by the method of ethnography than by the genre. If I could get more of them into my classroom, I think I could convince them that the method of ethnography is inseparable from the genre of ethnography. You have to learn to write about what you’re experiencing, what you’re witnessing, and that will help us be more innovative in our approach to method.

Yet I don’t blame the students. To desire art in ethnography is to cast doubt on our commitment to maintaining the sobriety and respectability of anthropology within the university system. To long for art in ethnography is to risk losing it all—our academic departments; our scientific grants; the jobs that eventually allow us to settle down surrounded by native rugs, clay pots, and bark paintings that we are always certain must be of much better quality than the second-rate stuff sold to the tourists; the conferences that awaken us from our poetic day-dreaming and remind us of the real intellectual work remaining to be done.

Until the time comes when we pursue the art of ethnography without fear, ethnography will remain a second-fiddle genre, a poor stepchild of memoir and fiction, an academically safe form of writing. Or the art of ethnography will be taken over by creative writers and artists who will do ethnography without credentials and do it so beautifully that they will be sure to call it anything but ethnography.

Notes

Acknowledgments. This essay was originally prepared for a panel on “The Art of Ethnography: Narrative Style as a Research Method,” American Anthropological Association Meetings, November 16, 2006. My sincere thanks to Russell Sharman for organizing such a fascinating panel and for also taking on the editorship of this special issue.

References Cited

- Behar, Ruth
 1993 *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story*. Boston: Beacon.
 1999 Ethnography: Cherishing Our Second-Fiddle Genre. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28(5):472–484.
 2003 Ethnography and the Book That Was Lost. *Ethnography* 4(1):15–39.
- Benedict, Ruth
 1986 Of Graves. *Dialectical Anthropology* 11(2–4):169.
- Bluebond-Langner, Myra
 1978 *The Private Worlds of Dying Children*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Clifford, James
 1986 *Ethnographic Allegory*. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds. Pp. 98–121. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 1988 *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds.
 1986 *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Diamond, Stanley
 1986 Preface. *Dialectical Anthropology* 11(2–4):130.
- Duneier, Mitchell
 1999 *Sidewalk*. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux.
- Finn, Janet
 1995 *Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing against the Grain*. In *Women Writing Culture*. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, eds. Pp. 131–147. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Frank, Gelya
 1995 *Ruth Behar's Biography in the Shadow: A Review of Reviews*. *American Anthropologist* 97(2):357–359.
- Geertz, Clifford
 1973 *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*. In *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*. Pp. 3–30. New York: Basic.
- 1983 *Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought*. In *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Pp. 19–35. New York: Basic Books.
- Hernandez, Graciela
 1995 *Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionality: Zora Neale Hurston's Experimental Ethnographies*. In *Women Writing Culture*. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, eds. Pp. 148–165. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Limón, José
 1994 *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Murphy, Robert
 1990 *The Body Silent*. New York: Norton.
- Myerhoff, Barbara
 1978 *Number Our Days*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Narayan, Kirin
 1997 *How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist?* In *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life*. Louise Lamphere, Helena Ragoné, and Patricia Zavella, eds. Pp. 23–41. New York: Routledge.
- Pratt, Mary Louise
 1986 *Field Work in Common Places*. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. Pp. 27–50. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prose, Francine
 2006 *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People Who Love Books and for Those Who Want to Write Them*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Taylor, Julie
 1998 *Paper Tangos*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Tedlock, Barbara
 1991 *From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography*. *Journal of Anthropological Research* 47(1):69–94.
- Wacquant, Loic
 2004 *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*. New York: Oxford University Press.